

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 219.]

DRY DOCK AT BROOKLYN, AND LAND BETWEEN NAVAL
HOSPITAL AND NAVY YARD, BROOKLYN.

DOCUMENTS

RELATING

*To the purchase of the land lying between the naval hospital and navy yard,
Brooklyn, New York, and in relation to the dry dock at Brooklyn, New
York.*

APRIL 7, 1848.

Ordered to be printed.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, *February 5, 1848.*

SIR: I have the honor to transmit a copy of a communication from the chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, with accompanying trace maps, showing the plan of the navy yard and hospital grounds at Brooklyn, New York, and the grounds lying between these two places.

The public interest, in my opinion, will be greatly promoted by the purchase of the intervening ground, so as to connect the two establishments belonging to the government, for naval purposes. The claims of riparian proprietors will, unless the purchase be now made, lead to expensive and tedious litigation, and if maintained, seriously affect the value of the public property and its utility for the purposes for which it has been purchased and improved.

Entertaining this opinion, I have addressed to Mr. Frederick Griffing a letter, of which I also enclose a copy; and I recommend, if it meet the approbation of the honorable Committee on Naval Affairs, that authority be given to make the purchase, and the necessary appropriation made to consummate the purchase on the terms arranged between the chief of the bureau and the proprietor, which appear to me reasonable.

I have the honor to be, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

J. Y. MASON.

Hon. T. BUTLER KING,

Chairman Committee on Naval Affairs, H. R.

NEW YORK, *September 19, 1846.*

SIR: Having for some time been in treaty with the owners for the purchase of the property lying between the naval hospital and navy yard in the city of Brooklyn, with a view of selling it to the government, and not wishing

to incur so heavy a responsibility without having some guarantee that they would take it at a given sum, the subject has been before the bureau twice, who are in favor of its purchase. I was in Washington two days before the close of the last session of Congress, and the maps were then put before the late Secretary, Mr. Bancroft. He stated the necessity of the government's having it; but, as he was soon to leave the office, did not wish then to act, but would (in case he should continue) ask an appropriation. I also would like to know if you could become the purchaser without its being made known, until I could have time to get the titles perfected, as there are between twenty and thirty owners, who have to be bought out singly; and if it should be known that the government is to become the purchaser, they would ask such exorbitant prices that it never could be bought; and they are now starting improvements upon the property, such as running streets through it, and bringing private interests in immediate contact with the present yard. If the government ever wish to possess the property, now is the time, as there is now but one street that has been opened through to the bay; but others will soon follow, as you will see by reference to a copy of a map which I gave Commodore Stringham the day before yesterday, which, if he has not, he will forward to the department.

You will perceive by the map that it is absolutely necessary the government should have the property; otherwise our merchant vessels will be in such close contact with the government vessels, that you could jump from one to the other. If you should consider it advisable, I will take a trip to your city, and will there explain to you in a more clear light the whole situation of the property, and show you the map, with the proposed improvements, and how it can be purchased by the government at a less sum than in any other manner. Being a property owner in the vicinity, makes me conversant with the whole matter.

Very respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

FREDERICK GRIFFING.

Hon. JOHN Y. MASON.

NEW YORK, *November 16, 1847.*

SIR: Referring to my former letter to you on the same subject, I have entered into written contracts for the purchase of all the ground between the navy yard and navy hospital, lying north of Flushing avenue, and the rights of the riparian owners to the ground covered by water (or mud flats) in said bay; and am now prepared to make a sale of the same to the government should they desire to purchase. The deeds of conveyance have not yet been executed to me, but are to be made ready and delivered within ninety days from the 15th October past. The property which I propose to sell to the government, by reference to the enclosed diagram is marked with a cross in each corner on the channel and on Flushing avenue, which I can give a satisfactory title for. The line which you have marked out upon the map made by Mr. Day, running across the bay, is merely a line of jurisdiction given by the State, which was satisfactorily shown at Albany they had no right to give, which all admit; at any rate, I can give a good title to it from the city of New York, as being the riparian owner. My object now is not to discuss those questions. If the govern-

ment become the purchaser on Flushing avenue, they then have the whole of the front, without any doubt, as the two sides are now in their possession. The property is well worth \$100 per running foot on Flushing avenue, and at that price I make them an offer of the property; and if my proposition for a sale be entertained, the question of final purchase may be left open until the adjournment of Congress. In the meantime an appropriation can be made of any sum not exceeding \$100 per foot; but if the government should not wish to purchase, it is desirable speedily to know it, in order that I may go on with my plans for improving it.

I remain, your obedient servant,

FREDERICK GRIFFING.

Hon. J. Y. MASON,
Secretary of the Navy.

BUREAU OF YARDS AND DOCKS,
November 19, 1847.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the reference to this bureau, for opinion, of a letter to you from Mr. Frederick Griffing, dated 16th inst.

It is very desirable, in my opinion, that the United States should own the land and flats lying between the navy yard and naval hospital, at Brooklyn, New York, described in the plan accompanying the letter of Mr. Griffing. Many good reasons could be adduced for the acquirement of this property by the United States. First, the public ground would be established by important and permanent boundary on a wide and public avenue. Second, the government would control the waters of the Wallabout, and therefore frequent interruptions to the works of the yard by ferry boats and other craft passing that narrow channel, and perhaps coming in contact with public vessels, would be prevented. Third, the location of the present navy yard—which has been decided, after many surveys of and reports upon other sites, to be the permanent site for a navy yard and dock at the port of New York—is very contracted and inadequate for such an important establishment as that ultimately will be. Fourth, the encroachments by citizens upon the public boundary, abutting their improvements on the line on either side, proving a great annoyance.

This property, in my opinion, is not worth to the government more than *eighty-five dollars* per running foot on the line of Flushing avenue, with all the rights and privileges of the "riparian" proprietors. That price I would respectfully recommend to be offered for it, provided Congress, on application, authorize the purchase, after a full and satisfactory examination by proper and legal authority of the title.

The papers are herewith returned.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, your obedient servant,

JOS. SMITH.

Hon. J. Y. MASON,
Secretary of the Navy.

NAVY DEPARTMENT,
Washington, December 11, 1847.

SIR: Referring to your letter of the 16th November last, and to the plan which accompanied it, and by the recommendation of the chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, I am willing to recommend to Congress an appropriation of two hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars for the purchase of the land described in that letter and plan, situated in Brooklyn, New York, bounded north by the Wallabout channel, south by Flushing avenue, east by the grounds of the United States naval hospital, and west by the grounds of the United States navy yard; understanding that for this sum you will make a perfect title, satisfactory to the United States district attorney, New York, to the whole of the premises thus described, including the rights of the riparian owners to the flats in the bay, and that no right is to be reserved to you, except that of taking off the buildings which are now on the property, and constructing a sewer under ground through the western lot of said land from Flushing avenue to the channel. Upon these terms, if you assent to them, I will complete the purchase, as soon as the necessary appropriation shall be made by Congress; and that no time may be lost in bringing the subject to the attention of the proper committees, I will thank you to inform me without delay whether you will accede to this proposal. Should you do so, and Congress should neglect or fail to make the appropriation for the purpose at its present session, it is not expected that you will be further bound by your agreement.

Very respectfully yours,

J. Y. MASON.

FREDERICK GRIFFING, Esq.,
Washington.

BUREAU OF YARDS AND DOCKS,
January 25, 1848.

SIR: Agreeably to your directions, I have the honor herewith to submit two copies of the plan of the navy yard and hospital grounds at Brooklyn, New York, embracing also the grounds lying between these two places. The purchase of these intervening grounds I consider of great importance to the government.

The price at which the proprietors agree now to take for this property I consider to be reasonable, and respectfully recommend that the purchase be made without delay, provided the title shall prove satisfactory to the law officer of the government, and Congress shall make the necessary appropriation.

Should the purchase be delayed or postponed to a future period, I fear the opportunity to secure this property will be lost, or that a larger sum may be demanded than it can now be had for; I therefore respectfully recommend that application be made to Congress for an appropriation of the necessary means, and that the property in question be secured without delay.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, your obedient servant,

JOS. SMITH.

Hon. J. Y. MASON,
Secretary of the Navy.

BUREAU OF YARDS AND DOCKS,
April 1, 1848.

SIR: I have received your letter of the 31st ultimo, returning the memorandum respecting the dry dock at Brooklyn navy yard, which I had the honor to submit for your consideration some days since, and which you now desire may be officially communicated, with my opinion as to the expediency of going on to complete the dock.

I am directed by the Secretary of the Navy to comply with your request, and to say that the memorandum referred to was prepared by his direction, and received his approbation as a fair exposition of the questions connected with the prosecution of the dry dock at Brooklyn, giving important information compiled from official papers, in a convenient form, to those whose duty it was to determine them. The Secretary desires that the information may assume an official form, and instructs me to say, that although not called on, his opinion is decidedly in favor of finishing the work.

I have respectfully to state, as my opinion, that the interests of the United States require that the work should be prosecuted without delay, and with energy; the wood material of which the coffer-dam is constructed is not of a durable character, and unnecessary delay might endanger the safety of the work.

I had stated in the memorandum that to complete the dock, there would be required \$667,860 39, viz:

For materials	-	-	-	-	-	\$365,675 03
For labor	-	-	-	-	-	214,540 41
For contingencies	-	-	-	-	-	87,644 95
						<hr/> 667,860 39 <hr/>

I am, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

JOSEPH SMITH.

HON. SAMUEL F. VINTON,

Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, H. R.

MEMORANDUM.

The site for a dry dock at New York was examined in 1826, when the sites for the present docks at Boston and Norfolk were selected. The examinations at New York appear to have been favorable, and received the approval of Congress. Nothing, however, was done until the passage of the appropriation of \$100,000, 3d March, 1835, when the site was surveyed, &c., and about \$5,000 expended: the balance of the appropriation remained in the treasury until December, 1837, when it was carried to the surplus fund.

From this period until the appropriation of 1841 was passed, although the subject was from time to time brought to the attention of Congress by the Secretary of the Navy in his annual reports, owing to various conflicting opinions as to the site most eligible for a dock, no decisive measures were taken for its construction. By the act of 3d of March, 1841, making appropriations for the navy, the sum of \$50,000 was embraced in the items for improvements at New York, for commencing a dry dock at that yard.

Under this appropriation the work was commenced by E. H. Courtenay, esq., engineer, in the month of October following. Mr. Courtenay continued in charge of the work until August, 1842, when it was suspended, \$35,264 75 having been expended thereon.

By the act of 4th of August, 1842, the sum of \$129,000 was appropriated for the New York yard, [among the items which make up this sum was \$100,000 for the dry dock,] with these *provisos*—that no part of this or any former appropriation shall be applied to the construction of a dry dock, &c., &c., until a suitable place shall be selected in the harbor of New York, &c. *Provided also*, That the Secretary of the Navy may, in his discretion, apply the sum of \$100,000 of the amount appropriated, and any balance of former appropriations, for the construction of a dry dock at Brooklyn, to the construction of a floating dock, &c., at the same place, &c.

Under the first provision of the above act a commission, consisting of Captains Conner and Shubrick, and Moncure Robinson, esq., civil engineer, was appointed 12th of August, 1842, by Mr. Secretary Upshur, to ascertain whether or not a place more suitable than the present one for a navy yard and dock might not be found in the harbor of New York. Their report, dated 27th October, 1842, gives the present site preference over all others examined.

In execution of the latter provision of the act referred to, Captain B. Kennon, Samuel Humphreys, esq., chief naval constructor, and Professor W. R. Johnson, were appointed to proceed to New York and examine the various plans of floating docks, their advantages and disadvantages, as compared with a dry dock, &c. These gentlemen reported 8th October, 1842, expressing a preference for the permanent stone dock over all others, and for the balance dock over the floating docks examined.

By act of 3d March, 1843, the Secretary of the Navy was directed to cause examinations to be made of the practicability and probable expense of constructing a dock at New York, of capacity sufficient to raise a 74-gun ship, upon the principle of using the Croton aqueduct as an elevating power; also to examine other plans of floating or dry docks deemed worthy to be reported upon, suspending all expenditures of previous appropriations for dry dock at New York until 1st January, 1844.

Mr. Secretary Henshaw appointed W. P. S. Sanger, esq., civil engineer, to make the required examinations under the above act, whose report, dated 23d January, 1844, disapproves of the plan of using the Croton power, but admits the practicability of constructing a floating dock of the required capacity.

By the act of 17th June, 1844, the unexpended balance of the appropriation of 4th August, 1842, (\$100,000,) was directed to be immediately expended in continuation of the work already commenced for the construction of a stone dock at New York, or to construct a dry dock on some other plan, if the Secretary of the Navy should deem the same best suited for the purposes of the navy.

After a personal examination, Mr. Secretary Mason determined that the work upon the stone dock should be resumed; and for this purpose General W. G. McNeil was appointed engineer, and the work commenced 10th of October, 1844, from which time until 1st of April, 1845, when he was succeeded by Mr. Sanger, the sum of \$114,671 83 was expended. Mr. Sanger was succeeded by the present engineer, Mr. McAlpine, 23d June, 1846.

Subsequent appropriations for this work have increased the amount granted to the aggregate sum of \$825,000, as follows:

1841, March 3d—Amount appropriated	-	-	-	\$50,000
1844, June 17, do do	-	-	-	100,000
1845, March 3, do do	-	-	-	150,000
1846, August 10, do do	-	-	-	250,000
1847, March 3, do do	-	-	-	275,000
				<hr/>
				825,000
				<hr/>

The expenditures to the 1st March, 1848, have been—

For materials	-	-	-	-	\$388,284 03
For labor	-	-	-	-	443,855 58
					<hr/>
					832,139 61
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Of the amount reported as expended above, there remains unpaid—

Of labor	-	-	-	-	\$26,241 84
Of materials	-	-	-	-	1,300 43
					<hr/>
					27,542 27

To which should be added the amount of 10 per cent. retained on bills of materials furnished, amounting to	-	7,734 16
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Making the whole amount due to 1st March, 1848	-	35,276 43
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The additional amount required to complete the dock is estimated as follows:

For materials	-	-	-	-	\$365,675 03
For labor	-	-	-	-	214,540 41
For contingencies	-	-	-	-	87,644 95
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Total	-	-	-	-	667,860 39
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Of which amount there will be remaining at the completion of the work, engines, machines, tools, buildings, cattle, &c., to the value of about \$50,000.

It is believed that the dock will be completed to receive vessels by the 1st October, 1850, if funds are provided in time to meet the demands for a vigorous prosecution of the work.

The sums required to meet existing engagements, and to place the work in a state of security in the event of its being suspended, is estimated at \$145,840 55.

The following statement will explain some of the circumstances which tend to swell the cost of the dock beyond the original estimate:

The *coffer-dam* was originally estimated to cost about \$47,000. More than twice that sum was expended upon the dam and protection piling before an attempt was made to remove the water; and since the time it was considered complete, about \$80,000 have been expended in securing the dam and repairing breaches; making the whole cost to this date nearly

\$200,000. This dam has been enlarged to three times its original dimensions, the expense of which has been increased in consequence of the necessity of doing the work while other works in connexion with it were in progress.

The *excavation* was estimated to cost about \$40,000. The cost of this item will amount to \$140,000. This increase has been occasioned by the bad character of the soil, a large portion of which it was necessary to remove in a semi-fluid state, rendered worse by the successive fillings of the pit and the numerous springs near its bottom. The sliding character of the material greatly increased the quantity to be removed.

The *foundation* was originally estimated to cost about \$70,000. The actual cost will be about \$125,000. The foundation has been increased in area, and the number of piles about one-half, and they driven to a greater depth than was at first contemplated. The bottom springs broke up the foundation in several places, and in all instances increased the expense of performing the work.

The dimensions of the dock have been enlarged since its commencement, increasing the quantity of masonry about one-fourth.

These circumstances, together with suspensions, renewal of operations, and change of superintendents and engineers, have added to its cost beyond the original estimate.

JOS. SMITH, *Chief of Bureau.*

MARCH 31, 1848.